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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BK](#)
SUBJECT: BOSNIA - FM ALKALAJ SEEKS CONTROL OF NATO
COORDINATION TEAM

Classified By: Ambassador Charles English for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Given the current political environment, keeping Bosnia on the NATO track is even more critical to U.S. objectives here. Therefore, we are concerned by a recent move by Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Sven Alkalaj to politicize this issue by challenging Minister of Defense (MOD) Cikotic's leadership of Bosnia's NATO accession process. Under Cikotic's leadership, the MOD has developed a reputation for apolitical competence that is unmatched within the Bosnian government. By contrast, Alkalaj and his ministry have been mired in one political controversy after another since February. Alkalaj is also widely perceived as a shill for Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic, and has developed a reputation for shading the truth. We suspect that Alkalaj has manipulated a conversation with NATO International Staff to justify his challenge, and believe that the MOD remains more capable of maintaining leadership of this process. End Summary.

ALKALAJ SEEKS CONTROL OF COORDINATION BODY

12. (C) On November 13, Goran Pranjic, the MFA's pointman for NATO issues, shared with us an October letter from Foreign Minister Alkalaj to Defense Minister Cikotic advocating a change in the composition and leadership of Bosnia's interagency NATO Coordination Team. The team, recently established by the Council of Ministers, is currently chaired by Deputy Defense Minister Igor Crnadak and has just begun its coordination duties to prepare Bosnia for NATO membership. Crnadak's performance to date has been uniformly praised by NATO HQ and his Bosnian government counterparts, and he recently led a Bosnian delegation to Brussels for consultations with the NATO International Staff and permanent representatives. In his letter, Alkalaj asserts that a senior official from "NATO HQ Brussels" had raised concerns about the Coordination Team, and had told him that the MFA should take the leadership role in a reconstituted body. Alkalaj advocated that the group should be reformed at the political level to either have a Foreign Minister or triumvirate chairmanship of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Defense and Security. (Note: Two of these ministers are Bosniaks, and Alkalaj, officially an "other" as he is Jewish, is representative of Silajdzic's Bosniak Party for BiH. End Note.) Such a change, would require the Council of Ministers

to take another decision reforming the group.

A SURPRISING REQUEST

13. (C) The Ministry of Defense was taken by surprise by Alkalaj's request. MOD officials viewed it as an attempt to take control of the coordination body, which would needlessly disrupt Bosnia's progress towards NATO membership. Minister Cikotic characterized Alkalaj's letter as "stupid" and said he had no intention of responding. He hoped his silence would be sufficient to allow the matter to die. Cikotic argued that MOD was the only ministry capable of leading the NATO accession process, adding that this was why the COM decided to assign MOD the chairmanship of the Coordination Team. Crnadak was also upset by Alkalaj's letter, noting that he had worked hard to build an inclusive team and that it was making substantial progress, most particularly in preparing Bosnia's first NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). NATO HQ staff in Sarajevo tell us that they had no advance warning of Alkalaj's request and have quietly told both Cikotic and Crnadak that the work of the team as currently constituted should be continued.

MFA BEHIND THE NATO CURVE

14. (C) Alkalaj's request is somewhat puzzling, because, despite his previous service as Bosnia's NATO Ambassador, he has shown little interest in NATO issues to date and in preparing the MFA to meet its NATO and PfP responsibilities. A full year after Bosnia joined PfP and announced its intention of NATO membership, the MFA still has only one official, Pranjic, a mid-level diplomat, working directly on NATO issues. For the NATO Coordination Team, Alkalaj

appointed his Assistant Minister for Visa and Consular Affairs as deputy chairman, who has himself admitted to us he has neither the background nor expertise to adequately perform this role. NATO HQ Sarajevo has routinely complained that MFA's failure to adequately prepare for its NATO responsibilities will impact the pace at which Bosnia moves through the complicated accession process. The result is that MOD has taken an atypically large role in the coordination of PfP and accession activities. Recently, the MOD was forced to take charge of moving the NATO-PfP Status of Forces Agreement through the Bosnian government, an activity that should have been fully within the capacity of the MFA.

FURTHER CONCERNS

15. (C) Aside from the institutional and organizational issues, Alkalaj's performance as Minister raises further concerns about his ability to direct the NATO integration process in an effective, transparent, and apolitical manner. Since assuming office in February, Alkalaj has done little to dispel his reputation as Bosniak member of the Presidency Haris Silajdzic's man in the Council of Ministers. Both Presidents Komsic and Radmanovic routinely complain that Alkalaj seems to work only for Silajdzic, and does not keep the other Presidents informed of the activities of the Ministry and some of his diplomatic dealings. Radmanovic became particularly incensed in April when, at Silajdzic's direction, Alkalaj quietly arranged, without formal Presidency sanction, a state-level visit to the United Nations to celebrate Bosnia's independence that Silajdzic used to present his "interpretation" of the ICJ's Srebrenica verdict to an international audience. Alkalaj also has a record of leaking inaccurate information to the media about the content of his confidential high-level diplomatic meetings, including those with USG officials. Alkalaj's ministry has bounced from one crisis or mini-scandal to another in the past half year, all of which has served to further internally polarize the MFA and greatly hinder its effectiveness. Morale seemed to reach a low-point in October, when the MFA's General-Secretary sent a letter to the diplomatic community, complaining about Alkalaj's

management style and allegedly illegal initiative to reform the personnel structure. The letter noted that it was sent with the full support of the number two in the MFA, Deputy Minister Ana Trisic-Babic. (Comment. As disappointing as Alkalaj's performance has been, the performance of his senior management has been equally troubling. The General-Secretary has been linked to allegations of corruption, and Deputy Minister Trisic-Babic, a confidant of RS Prime Minister Dodik, has publicly engaged in partisan arguments with Alkalaj on several occasions. End Comment.)

COMMENT: MOD MUST REMAIN IN LEAD FOR NOW

16. (C) As we discreetly told Pranjic when presented a copy of the Foreign Minister's letter, we believe that Alkalaj's proposal would be highly counter-productive. We have consulted on the matter with NATO HQ Sarajevo, which shares our concerns about the disruptive impact an overhaul of the Coordination Team could have in advance of the Bucharest Summit, where Bosnia hopes to highlight substantial progress in defense reform and NATO integration. Considering the political crisis in the country, with the Council of Ministers in a "technical mandate" following the resignation of Prime Minister Spiric, it would be highly unlikely that the COM could quickly act to set-up a new coordinating structure. We certainly recognize that at some point the MFA must take a greater, if not leading, role in the NATO ascension process, but, under Alkalaj, it remains a weak, politically and ethically divided institution that does not have the capacity to direct such an important activity for the Bosnian state. Conversely, Minister Cikotic's Ministry of Defense has established its bona fides as a professionally run, non-partisan and competent institution. The Coordination Team, under the very able leadership of Crnadak, must be allowed to continue its important work free from the larger political problems plaguing the country. End Comment
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